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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1200
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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 0044
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 1058
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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TIMOR-LESTE: BORDER CHALLENGES REMAIN IN OECUSSI

REF: A) SURABAYA 55, B) SURABAYA 58

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Summary

1. From August 11 - 13, Poloff traveled to the enclave district of Oecussi, located within the boundaries of Indonesia's West Timor province, to attend a cultural festival and to assess border conditions in Timor-Leste's westernmost district. Travel to Oecussi is hampered by requirements for Indonesian visa and vehicle permits; public reliance on a weekly ferry service to Dili; and a lingering lack of capacity within the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) and Timorese Immigration institutions, including as lack of radios, computers, and telephone links between border posts and Dili. These constraints were underscored this week by mechanical failures which caused the suspension of the ferry service, thereby stranding in Oecussi over 100 visitors from Dili who traveled to attend the enclave's weeklong cultural heritage festival. Implementation of a border crossing card system, or the issuance of Indonesian visas at the border, would alleviate some of the transportation problems. End summary.

Red Tape at the Border

2. The district of Oecussi, surrounded on three sides by Indonesia and the Savu Sea to the north, is not contiguous with the rest of Timor-Leste. The only ferry connecting the enclave to Dili suspended its weekly service this week for mechanical repairs, stranding over 100 passengers who traveled to attend the weeklong Oecussi cultural festival (August 10 - 16). (Note: In an August 18 meeting with visiting U.S. officials, Finance Minister Emilia Pires complained the vessel had been sent to Surabaya because that Timor-Leste has no indigenous capacity to make even minor repairs. End note.) Travelers from Oecussi overwhelmingly choose the ferry service due to lack of road transportation, high fuel costs, and consular requirements (see below).

3. For overland travel from Dili to Oecussi, travelers must clear Timorese and Indonesian immigration posts at each of the two borders. They must also have both an Indonesian visa and a passenger vehicle permit; these are issued only at the Indonesian Embassy in Dili. Travelers resort to petty bribery when they lack these documents. Overland vehicle travel originating in Oecussi is impractical due to the fact that the

necessary Indonesian permits cannot be obtained there.

¶4. Red tape is not the only hindrance to travel. On August 11, Poloff waited for an hour and a half at the first border checkpoint while Timorese immigration officials confirmed from the Indonesian Embassy in Dili that the vehicle permit issued to the U.S. Embassy vehicle was valid. Undisciplined border personnel was also a problem. During the return trip to Dili on August 13, we waited for two hours at the Oecussi checkpoint for the Timorese immigration officer to report for to work. Several PNTL officers on the scene reported that three members of the Timor-Leste National Parliament waited the same length of time the previous day until the immigration officer's arrival. In spite of the presence of PNTL officers, no one was authorized to grant permission to leave Timorese territory into Indonesia except the Timorese immigration officer.

Security Challenges

¶5. There are 34 UN Police Mission (UNPOL) officers, 120 PNTL officers, over 12 immigration, and 78 Border Patrol officers assigned to Oecussi. The Timorese personnel continue to face serious basic capacity challenges. Officers assigned to the border post between Oecussi and Indonesia lack radios and telephone line reception. In case of emergency, they would be effectively cut off from communications with police, military, or immigration officials in Oecussi's district capital Pante Maksasar or Dili. The infrastructures at the Indonesian checkpoints were more modern and better stocked with communications equipment. In contrast, Timor's infrastructure, especially between Oecussi and West Timor, was dilapidated and lacking basic equipment. One new Timorese immigration structure erected last year in Oecussi remains unfinished, and officers reported that construction work there was discontinued "months ago."

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¶6. During conversations with Poloff, PNTL Immigration, and Indonesian officials noted that no serious discussion have been held between Timor-Leste and Indonesia to revamp border crossing procedures. However, officers from both countries noted they are aware of their duty to combat human and drug trafficking, although they admitted that the border remains porous and vulnerable to undetected illegal entries. They also acknowledged that low salaries may tempt some officers to accept bribes, although they alleged that they "personally have not known of such a case."

UNPOL mentorship

¶7. PNTL officers in Oecussi are mentored by UNPOL officers, and an UNPOL detachment is assigned to work side by side with its Timorese counterpart. The PNTL in Oecussi lack photocopy or fax machines, and only have one operational patrol vehicle assigned to its unit, three computer terminals donated by the United Nations in 2002. Accordingly, the PNTL cannot operate independently from UNPOL assistance at this time. PNTL officers also reported that the Oecussi detachment has not received new uniforms since 2003, unlike other PNTL units, because it is isolated from the rest of the country. In spite of these challenges, UNPOL officers and the PNTL Deputy Commander described morale within the PNTL as "good" and praised the assistance provided by UNPOL to professionalize the force. Women compose over one third of the PNTL force in Oecussi, indicating evidence of more opportunities for women within the state's security sector.

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